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ADDRESS DURING THE FINAL EXERCISES
JUNE 7-11, 1914

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The Present Value of Virginia Traditions in the Public Service

I appreciate greatly the privilege and the honor of addressing the College of William and Mary, its graduates, its students, and friends on this Baccalaureate occasion. In a sense, this is hallowed ground. No one familiar with the service, the traditions and the associations of this venerable institution can approach its precincts without reverence, and, to some extent at least, without emotion. It is not for me to recall to her sons the honorable and the useful part William and Mary has played in American life, except by way of justifying, if it were needed, the profound and grateful appreciation that a son of Virginia, resident for many years in another State, feels on visiting, once more, the spot where cluster the memories that bring distinguishing honor to every man born in Virginia and that stir the heart and fire the ambition of every Virginia lad.

Many years ago a woman occupying a prominent place in New York social life said to me: "I do not quite know the reason, but it is true that most of the people I meet have a respect for Virginians, quite distinct from the feeling entertained toward the natives of other States. It is such a proud distinction," she added, "to be merely a Virginian."

Now, I would not quote this remark to any but a Virginia audience. For it might elsewhere seem, if not invidious, at least in bad taste. But, surely, in the house of one's friends, one may say some things that he would not want to say elsewhere. And especially so, if he have in his purpose, a reason for saying it, quite apart from vainglory. Every mother is justified in appealing to her son for the maintenance of a high standard in his own life, to point to the high standard in the life of his father, and his father's father, and to instill into him a reverence for all that is good in his stock, that he may, if possible, improve upon it. If this be vanity, or mere maternal pride, it is a sort of

vanity and pride that make for good in the world, and point the way to higher thinking and better living.

I have never forgotten that gentlewoman's phrase: "Merely a Virginian." It was burnt into my mind. I would like, if I could to burn it into your minds, if you will take with it what I understand it to mean, and what I think that lady unconsciously perhaps in its details, had in her mind.

Now, I want to speak to you to-day, very simply, but I hope unaffectedly, and not at too great length, on "The Present Value of Virginia Traditions in the Public Service," because I feel that the time is ripe and the occasion opportune, for our communing together on this subject.

To be "merely a Virginian," carries certain ideas of manhood which it is easier to conceive than to express. Ordinarily we do not care to talk about such matters because, apart from the personal aspect, the subject is spiritual and elusive. The Virginian that I have in mind is, as it were, an atmosphere, an influence, an emanation. In speaking of him, my purpose is to describe, not an individual, but a type. When that gentlewoman used the phrase "Merely a Virginian," she was not taking him from any particular class in Virginia life, or from any particular locality, or occupation or profession. The Virginian of this sort is of the common variety, resident everywhere in the State, and found in every condition of Virginia life. Such an one has in him the common Virginia ideals. He is not, necessarily, a perfect type of man, ethically or mentally. I cannot claim for him exemption from fault in any respect. I am willing to admit that he has all the vices of his virtues and that his imperfections may be more apparent and distressing to himself than to others.

Now, I am not going to indulge in adulation, and least of all do I intend to be in the slightest degree personal. If I shall happen in what I say to remind you of some things that gratify your State pride, I trust there will mingle with it a feeling of humility that genuine worth will generally beget. So that the records of the past may stir in us hopes that help and aspirations that uplift.

The Virginia type is, to be sure, a product of past conditions and environment. The Virginian came upon the stage at a most interesting and critical part of the play. His forefathers had been slowly but certainly moving on toward finer conceptions of political rights and religious principles. It is sardonically said that "Swells do not emigrate"; and we may concede that for the most part our ancestors were people who came here in the expectation of bettering their condition politically, religiously and socially. There was doubtless in all of them the English love of adventure and the restless English spirit of enterprise. But fundamentally our forefathers had convictions which induced them to hazard life and prospects in the wilds of the New World, in order to satisfy those convictions. Here it seems to me is the starting point in the life of all strong men: Convictions. They may be right or they may be wrong; at least, they are not weak. The men that came to Virginia started with strong and clear conceptions of popular rights that the best of Englishmen for generations had been enunciating and fighting for and dying for, and very readily too. Our ancestors had not discovered these for themselves. They had inherited them. But they learned also how to develop and improve their inheritance.

We marvel at the prominence they gave in all their undertakings to their religious views and principles—so sincere, so strong, so dominating and yet so oddly mixed up with all the concerns of life and so queerly and quaintly, and I must add at times so cruelly, applied. The charters under which these men came to Virginia provided especially for the propagation of religion among the savages, and the first beginnings of this College of William and Mary, almost coeval with the establishment of civil administration, were found in the strong conviction of the colonists that a seminary for the religious instruction and conversion of the natives ought to be promptly established.

It thus seems that the most salient feature in the character of the early Virginian was that he had convictions. I am not at the moment considering what his convictions were; the point is that he possessed convictions. Perhaps I should say more truly convictions possessed him. He was sincere in these convictions.

He took them seriously. He lived up to them. He was prepared to die for them. But they did not embitter his life, or apparently interfere with a wholesome, at least a very hearty, enjoyment of all the good things of life available to him. In his English blood there flowed a love of manly sports in the open air and of all the enjoyments of social life. The combination evolved a healthy whole-hearted, natural man. It equalized and harmonized his views, and turned him from morose self-inspection to well-balanced conservative judgments upon men and measures. Nothing seems so characteristic of the Virginian in history as his conservatism. His adhesion to what he believed to be right in morals and sound in politics was strong, consistent and abiding. His principles were not lightly adopted. He had come by them with great deliberation. He had maintained them at great cost. He could not and would not part with them. They were not mere intellectual vagaries, fancifully adopted to be lightly discarded, but part and parcel of his mental and moral make-up, to go with him and characterize him in all transactions of life. Principles so held could not but steady a man. They were bound to make him careful and deliberate in opinion as well as constant, equal and courageous, in action. Indecision generally means lack of perception as well as principle. Cowardice is not so much a physical failing as a moral vice, always and only to be overcome by convictions of duty.

This firm balance, hesitant only because the evidence was not all in, was exhibited in more than one crisis in the life of Virginia.

With what extreme reluctance did she enter upon the war of the Revolution until that course alone appeared consistent with her rights and yet with what indomitable spirit did she prosecute it! With what grief did Virginia part from the Union in 1861, and yet with what determination did she maintain that separation! The civilized world still marvels at the record of the Virginian in those times.

We love to linger over the ideals which united the Roman people and which made the Grecian republics as one in their best days. And we are wont to point to their renowned citizens, even in these days, as inspiring examples of the highest and best citizenship.

But surely no Virginian needs to turn to the ancient world or to foreign lands to find the best type of public and private worth. The annals of his own people furnish the best fuel to fire his own ambition, the finest incentives to a useful career.

It is quite true that we have passed into circumstances and conditions totally unlike those that existed when Virginia was the largest and most influential State in the Union.

Lord Roseberry relates in his memoir of the younger Pitt that when that English statesman heard the "heavy news indeed" of the battle of Austerlitz, the shock of the tidings brought on a weakness and emaciation painful to witness. He returned to his house at Putney to die. As he entered the villa, his eye rested on the map of Europe. "Roll up that map," he said; "it will not be wanted these ten years." Pitt was wrong only in supposing that the map that he ordered to be rolled up might be wanted after a decade—that map was never wanted again. But the best that Pitt struggled for survived all the maps that he imagined were essential to the peace and welfare of the Europe of his time.

And yet I take it that there is something immutably fine and worth while in these ideals of Virginia. They were set, not for the past merely, but for all time. We have not outgrown them. We cannot outgrow them. They may be abandoned, but then in that event Virginia becomes merely a memory.

The augurs of Rome in her later days are said to have laughed in their sleeves when they passed each other on the streets. But the Spirit of old Rome was then dead. Macedon did not undertake to subdue the Grecian republics, until the moral force of Athens and Sparta was gone.

It is true that the times are very different now from what some may call Virginia's Golden Age. The material development of the country has been marvelous. Our population has passed the 100 million mark. The flag floats over alien peoples in the Pacific, in the Caribbean, in the China Sea. The Republic had once none but citizens, now we have millions of subjects. Formerly it was universally believed that the Constitution followed

the Flag; now we know it does not, under the judgment of the Supreme Court of the United States. A chain of newspapers extending from the Atlantic to the Pacific is boldly advocating the seizure of all the territory south of our country to the Panama Canal and incorporating it as a part of the United States.

The opposition of the elder Virginia statesmen to conquest and land grabbing was embodied into the country's fundamental political principles. But an active propaganda proposes to set aside these and similar traditions, and inaugurate a strong centralized government with the policies and principles of an empire, rather than a confederacy of equal and sovereign States. The proposal to enfranchise the inhabitants of conquered territories, to make them all citizens of our country, entitled to vote and to representation in the Congress is supported by a large section of our fellow citizens. I am not here to advocate or oppose any particular political policy or procedure. But it seems appropriate to say that if the measure referred to were adopted, it is evident that the balance of power in the Congress would be held by peoples of the black and yellow races, not only undeveloped, unenlightened and uncivilized, but profoundly out of touch with Anglo-Saxon traditions, and American moral and civil principles. In the last election in Mexico with a population of about sixteen million, only 20,000 voted out of over three million people entitled to vote. Of this great aggregate of people, I am informed that only one-fifth are of what may be called the white race, the other four-fifths are paeons, Indians, negroes, and half-breeds of Spaniard, Indian and Negro.

Should the country seriously consider the propaganda to which I have averted, we shall sorely need a statesmanship with which the student of Virginia history is quite familiar, a public opinion and ideals of public service which Virginia has given to the country in its other critical periods. I once heard a public man in New York express the prediction that the country would yet stand in great need of the judgment and balance of Virginia and her lofty views of public service in the changes through which the country was passing. These changes are none the less real, or far-reaching, or even perilous, because they are slow and subtle and unrealized.

Things do not stand still in the political or moral world any more than they do in the natural world. If they do not go forward, they go backward. A social fabric gradually falls when the principles upon which it rests have lost their vitality and are no longer capable of application.

The world we live in is certainly different from that our fathers lived in. Conditions that they experienced and provided for have passed away. New conditions that they did not foresee and could not have foreseen surround us. Without doubt we have passed away from the earlier life of the States, just as they had passed away from the colonial life and environment. Each age has its own conditions to face and its own problems to solve. But human nature is much the same in all times. Our necessities and natural proclivities correspond to those of preceding generations. They differ, not in substance, but in social atmosphere and political circumstance. They all are subject to immutable laws, which preserve and perpetuate, if conformed to, or destroy, if violated.

Never in the history of our country have we needed more the Virginian, faithful to the traditions of his people. On all sides we hear and see things that are incompatible with those traditions. Commercialism in public service is so common that we cease to remark it. Indeed, in some parts of the country, the value of public office is not the honor of public service, as we have been taught in Virginia, but the opportunity of plundering the public treasury for oneself and one's friends. Acknowledged leaders of great parties and their associates in certain communities are openly charged with corruption, and satisfactory proofs of the charges have been submitted. No one doubts the fact, but the guilty leaders continue in their leadership; continue at the head of large political parties in pivotal, influential States, dictate nominations to the highest political trusts, and secure the election of their candidates upon terms of dishonorable servitude in office. I sincerely hope that I am shocking you here in Virginia in telling you these things, but I assure you they are so commonly known in certain other parts of our country that one would be there considered tiresome if he dwelt upon them in an address like this.

Last year the governor of the State of New York was removed from his high office by a Court of Impeachment upon grounds of "Moral turpitude," to use the phrase of the chief judge of the Court of Appeals, who also sat as the president of the Court of Impeachment. And yet this man so removed and so branded was subsequently elected by an overwhelming vote to the responsible office of member of the New York Legislature. Upon the invitation of numerous affiliated patriotic bodies in one of the boroughs of the City of New York, the impeached governor and present assemblyman delivered the principal address at the memorial services in the presence of a large audience on Memorial Day, May 30, 1914.

Now, when such things occur, one of several propositions must be true. Either the "Moral turpitude" of the Memorial Day orator was not thought incompatible with the office of legislator, or with the honor of delivering an oration on a patriotic occasion; or no credit was given to the finding of the High Constitutional Court of Impeachment, in which sat all the judges of the Court of Appeals of the State of New York; or it was a matter of indifference whether this orator had been proven guilty of corruption in office, and high crimes and misdemeanors, or not.

Foy my purpose, it matters little which of these propositions you think the more probable—whether you conclude that in the estimation of that section of the greatest and most influential city in the United States, and the second largest in the world "Moral turpitude" in public office is not incompatible with re-election to public office or with high civic honors on a patriotic occasion, or whether you conclude that no credit was given to a court of the highest dignity, constituted on the rarest occasions, to try the greatest crimes against the commonwealth, and consisting of the most honorable judiciary and legislative officers of the State, or whether you conclude that it was matter of indifference with those people whether the orator was guilty or not—which ever of these conclusions you adopt from the facts that I have recited, I think you will agree with me that they show a public opinion which ought to be corrected, or the absence of a public opinion which ought to be established. Who is to lead the way

to these remedies? Where are we to look for ideals that will bring the people back to a public conscience necessary to be maintained if our institutions are to be preserved! Where, if not to that people that more than any other were responsible for such ideals, that first formulated and continuously applied them in the practical administration of public affairs!

Nothing is more apparent to the publicist than that the prestige and power of the Federal Government have grown far beyond the expectation and intention of the great body of the people that created it. And the power and prestige of the several States as distinct sovereignties have correspondingly decreased. It is perhaps too soon in our history to hazard an opinion whether this change is on the whole a natural and wholesome evolution, or a dangerous subversion, indicating a decline from fundamental principles once deemed essential to the liberty and happiness of the people. Very few Virginians ever believed in a strong centralized government and your people have historically resisted the tendency in that direction. But they have been overborne by a movement, which has so far proved irresistible, but which presages peril, if it goes too long without check. Special privilege, monopoly, subsidy and class distinction seem the inevitable attendants upon centralization. And this means that the government will rest upon injustice, which has always caused and which always will cause social unrest, bloodshed, and if not corrected, revolution itself.

I have the less hesitancy in expressing a belief in the value of Virginia ideals in the crises through which the country is passing, because I think we are having at the present moment proofs of such value. The reversal of the policy of dollar diplomacy by the present administration, and its refusal to exploit the treasury of China for the benefit of the syndicate of the bankers of the great powers, by forcing that distracted country to borrow from them on exorbitant terms, recall the best traditions of Virginia's past. It was a just policy, even though thereby the antagonism of a powerful financial combination in the country was excited.

Nor are these ideals unadapted to enlightened progress and the best aspirations of the day. It was a Virginia ideal that engrafted

a new principle upon international law but a short time ago when President Wilson refused to recognize as president of Mexico a man who had reached that position by treachery and assassination. It had been sufficient previously, under the law of nations, to entitle a claimant to recognition that he was *de facto* ruler in actual control of the government, however detestable and criminal the means employed to secure that control, and in obedience to this principle, some of the great powers promptly recognized Victoriano Huerta. But to his immortal honor, Woodrow Wilson, contrary to immemorial custom among nations and resisting the tremendous pressure of powerful interests, refused to put the stamp of the approval of the American people upon chicanery and murder, as a means to governmental power.

Nothing has added so much to the moral refreshment of our political system or set a better precedent to other nations in times peculiarly material and commercial than these noble examples of public duty by a man of Virginia birth with Virginia traditions.

What Virginia has done for the common welfare of the whole country has not been worked up and put through by a few of her best citizens. Her career has been dominated and directed by the public sentiment of her citizens in mass, and sustained and crowned by her common opinion. Her achievements have not been those of a few heroes, but of the people as a whole. Heroes do not make a people. The people make the heroes. Great men are not the product of a nation intellectually weak and morally small. They only grow and develop among a people themselves great, not great, necessarily, in numbers, but great in moral force, great in principles, great in purpose.

In one respect, at least, this people, and all those whom its history has most influenced, differ from others. Virginia has ever ranked among her best and most revered citizens, those only whose moral life has been wholesome, whose purposes have been consecrated to unselfish, fearless, devoted service. Virginia has never placed mere intellect, however great, in the most honored places, in her battle abbeys. She has reserved such distinction for those who have rendered the greatest service and have been most

beloved in the hearts of her people, because they have combined the knightliest courage and genuineness with integrity and purity in public and private life.

Now this sort of reverence has not been accidental. It has proceeded from a people who believe in something, whose belief is fundamentally inwrought into the texture of their moral nature. Virginia's great men have simply approached and conformed to her standard, not she to theirs. She has produced them, not they her. She has made them great, not they her. When she had educated them to think her thoughts, they came forward to do her bidding. When they had become imbued with her ideals, she set them in high place to express Virginia, and not themselves, to the world. And Virginia honored them—and may I not claim that the world honored them—in proportion as they expressed the purposes, the aspirations, the ideals of all Virginians in every walk of life upon every foot of her soil.

It would be a disastrous mistake if the young men of Virginia were to suppose that the principles that controlled private and public life in the days of their fathers and forefathers were out of date and were no longer applicable to modern conditions. If we are all under the reign of law—and nothing is more obvious to the thoughtful man—that law must be unchanging and unchangeable, however diverse the circumstances to which it must be applied. Your fathers taught you the duty and the value of patriotism, sobriety, self-control, courage, and consideration for others, in the community in which you were brought up. You must not think these things will be any the less dutiful or valuable in the larger contact with the world; or that you may dispose of them in the crowded metropolis, where you imagine yourself unobserved or uninfluential. Upon the new and larger stage of your life they become, if anything, more dutiful, because more valuable and more necessary, for the welfare of your fellows and your own happiness. Think not that you, a true Virginian, will ever be lost in a crowd. There is a divinity about character that distinguishes a man wherever he goes, as if an invisible halo surrounded him, unconsciously indeed to himself, but consciously enough to others. We feel it in all that he says and all that he

does. He influences us in ways and at times that he knows nothing about. Long after he has passed away, we remember him with reverence and are grateful for his life.

It matters little where you go when you leave these walls, but it matters much whether you carry with you Virginia ideals. Your life will not depend upon the locality or the country where you will seek the means of livelihood but rather upon the spirit you take with you. I inculcate no narrow prejudice of provincial pharisaism, nor the isolated self-esteem of the remote and unsympathetic hamlet. We all need the loftiest and broadest appreciation of others and other communities, and the fine, kind feeling of co-operation and sympathy with everything and everybody moving toward better things. But you can do your part best, I make bold to say, by living up to those traditions which are a part of your birthright, and which start presumptions at once in your favor, wherever you go. If in weakness you betray them, you will find condemnation the greater and absolution the less because you are a Virginian. But if in intention, at least, you live up to them, you will have, not, perhaps, great commercial, or political, or social distinction, but a certain deep and consoling consciousness of being, with all humility, "Merely a Virginian."

As I was on my way to take the train to this city, I saw in one of the great metropolitan newspapers the report of the commander of the naval forces on the capture of Vera Cruz, under the orders of the President. From this report I extract the following paragraph, which may serve as a fitting illustration of the application of Virginia traditions in the public service:

"S. Clay, News Ferry, Va., ordinary seaman, battleship Vermont. Was twice wounded in the forearm during the engagement in front of the Naval Academy. He was ordered to the rear, and in so doing assisted another man who was dangerously wounded. He refused further medical attendance for himself other than a first-aid dressing, returned immediately to his station at the drag and continued his part in the handling and firing of the piece during the remainder of the day, although suffering great pain from his wounded arm.

"Two days afterward, while the battery was intrenched at Las Cocas, this boy was discovered to have escaped from the hospital, where he had been sent, and found his way out to the battery. He was sent back under guard."

S. Clay—ordinary seaman of the battleship Vermont—merely a Virginian!



